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### Website offers insurance resources for artists

The Artists' Health Insurance Resource Center is an up-to-date, comprehensive and unbiased database of healthcare resources for artists, performers, freelancers and the self-employed.

The Affordable Care Act is making health insurance available and affordable for the American artist. AHIRC helps artists navigate the new healthcare landscape.

Created in 1998 by The Actors Fund, the website provides a state-by-state overview of such topics as the Health Insurance Marketplace; what to look for in selecting a plan; subsidies and cost sharing; eligibility, cost and scope of coverage; public benefit plans for which artists may be eligible or arts associations they can join to qualify for group coverage; and links to other arts, insurance and information resources.

The fund's e-Learning Center also offers multimedia presentations that provide information, resources and practical tips on such topics as healthcare reform, Medicare and medications.

To learn more, visit [www.ahirc.org](http://www.ahirc.org).

## THE ARTIST'S TOOLBOX

# How creative geniuses come up with good ideas

By James Clear  
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In 2002, Markus Zusak sat down to write a book.

He began by mapping out the beginning and the end of the story. Then, he started listing out chapter headings, pages of them. Some made it into the final story, many were cut.

When Zusak began to write out the story itself, he tried narrating it from the perspective of Death. It didn't come out the way he wanted.

He rewrote the book, this time through the main character's eyes. Again, something was off.

He tried writing it from an outsider's perspective. Still no good.

He tried present tense. He tried past tense. Nothing. The text didn't flow.

He revised. He changed. He edited. By his own estimation, Zusak rewrote the first part of the book 150 to 200 times. In the end, he went back to his original choice and wrote it from the perspective of Death. This time – the 200th time – it felt right. When all was said and done it had taken Zusak three years to write his novel. He called it *The Book Thief*.

In an interview after his book was finally released, Zusak said, "In three years, I must have failed over a thousand times, but each failure brought me closer to what I needed to write, and for that, I'm grateful."

The book exploded in popularity. It stayed on the *New York Times* best-seller list for over 230 weeks. It sold 8 million copies. It was translated into 40 languages. A few years later, Hollywood came calling and turned *The Book Thief* into a major motion picture.

### The simple secret to good luck

We often think that blockbuster successes are luck. Maybe it's easier to explain success that way – as a chance happening, a fortunate outlier. No doubt, there is always some element of luck involved in every success story.

But Markus Zusak is proof that if you revise your work 200 times – if you find 200 ways to reinvent yourself, to get better at your craft – then luck seems to have a way of finding you.

How do creative geniuses come up with great ideas? They work and edit and rewrite and retry and pull out their genius through sheer force of will and perseverance. They earn the chance to be lucky because they keep showing up.

In her Dartmouth commencement address, Shonda Rimes shares a strategy that echoes Zusak's approach:

"Dreams do not come true just because you dream them. It's hard work that makes things happen. It's hard work that creates change ...

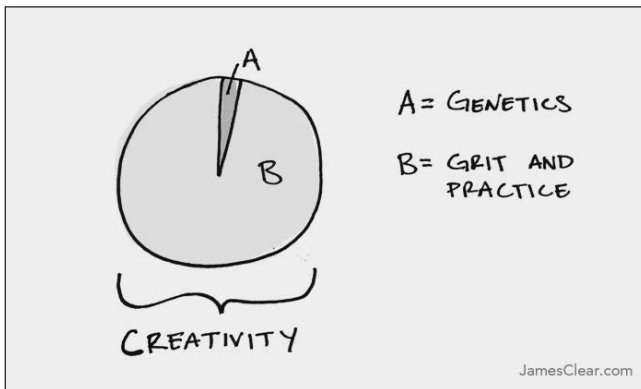
"Ditch the dream and be a doer, not a dreamer. Maybe you know exactly what it is you dream of being, or maybe you're paralyzed because you have no idea what your passion is. The truth is, it doesn't matter. You don't have to know. You just have to keep moving forward. You just have to keep doing something, seizing the next opportunity, staying open to trying something new. It doesn't have to fit your vision of the perfect job or the perfect life. Perfect is boring and dreams are not real. Just ... do.

"So you think, 'I wish I could travel.' Great. Sell your crappy car, buy a ticket to Bangkok, and go. Right now. I'm serious. You want to be a writer? A writer is someone who writes every day, so start writing."

### How creativity works

We all have some type of creative genius inside of us. The only way to release it is to work on it.

No single act will uncover more creative powers than forcing yourself to create consistently. For Markus Zusak that meant writing and re-writing 200 times. For you, it might mean singing a song over and over until it sounds right. Or programming a piece of software until all the bugs are out, taking portraits



of your friends until the lighting is perfect, or caring for the customers you serve until you know them better than they know themselves. You can make any job a work of art if you put the right energy into it.

How do creative geniuses come up with great ideas? They work hard at it.

James Clear describes himself as an entrepreneur and travel photographer who writes about "the struggle that we all face to become better leaders, better workers, and better people." Learn more at [jamesclear.com](http://jamesclear.com).

## How to send customized emails

*Dear Digit provides resources, ideas and tips to address digital communications questions from an arts perspective.*

"Dear Digit, I keep receiving professional-looking email newsletters, updates, and offers, and would love to send emails that look that great. But, I'm not a designer or a computer programmer, and I don't have the budget to hire one. Is there anything I can do?"



### The advantages of ESP platforms

Most likely, the emails you receive that look fabulously designed are created on Email Service Provider (ESP) platforms such as Constant Contact and MailChimp. Systems like these offer a host of benefits while still being budget-friendly.

For those of us working in the arts world, one of the primary attractions is the suite of professionally designed templates, which you can customize and adapt to suit. You can also set up different mailing lists, or divide mailing lists into subcategories based on the specific topics in which people are interested.

For example, when a new subscriber signs up, they could select from four options: a) using art in the classroom; b) art & science; c) classes and workshops; d) all the above. Then, when you send an email about your upcoming workshops, you would send only to the subscriber lists associated with the last two options. When people receive information they are personally interested in, they are more likely to engage and remain subscribers.

Although not terribly glamorous, the principle reason to use an ESP is to ensure you comply with anti-spam regulations. Whether you are an individual, business, or organization, doing so is essential if you send mass emails.

Most importantly, if you send emails that could be considered commercial, you are legally obligated to ensure your emails follow key requirements. A commercial email could be a request to donate money, an offer to purchase artwork, or a discount for your next photography workshop, etc. Even if you only send informational emails, you might include affiliate links, such as to books you recommend on Amazon.com.

The simplest approach, whether you send commercial emails or just friendly updates, is to follow the best practices for commercial emails. Period.

In many countries, legislation requires that you include the following in every email: a complete mailing address, the complete name of an individual human contact person (not just your business name), and a one-click link to unsubscribe from future emails. Of course, you should only email people who have provided permission to be contacted, and you should also provide a one- or two-sentence explanation of how subscribers wound up on your list.

Depending on where you send emails from, and where the recipients are, you may need to familiarize yourself with the nuances of legislation in the U.S., Canada, and/or elsewhere. Failure to comply with these rules can be astoundingly costly, as

fees can be assessed based on instances of noncompliance per day.

This all sounds daunting and it would be tempting to

either ignore it or just stop sending emails. But, there's no need to bail on an effective means of outreach and marketing – emailing directly to people who are interested. You just need to be smart about how you send emails; ESPs are programmed to ensure you comply.

For example, when you set up an account with MailChimp (MC), you are required to include contact information. That contact information is then automatically placed in the footer of every email you send from MC. So you don't even have to think about it.

### Dear Digit's vote for most user-friendly and flexible

Though I am not a rep, and am not otherwise associated with MC, I prefer their system, use it myself, and encourage others to explore what MC offers. Here are a few reasons why I like it:

MC is the most user-friendly platform I've used; even those with little design experience can navigate it fairly intuitively. Even better, it is free for mailing lists with less than 5,000 email addresses.

MC offers professional-quality templates that you can adapt, along with the flexibility to create your own if you have advanced coding skills.

The system is accessible online, so you can plan and send emails from your couch, your office, or even while on vacation. You can schedule your emails to send whenever you want. If you send a newsletter on the 30th of each month, and make time to prepare it mid-month, you can set the date and time, and it will automatically distribute while you're busy doing other things.

MC also provides a lot of useful data regarding things like who read (or didn't) your emails, what links they clicked on, etc. Over time, this information can help you track what kind of content is most interesting and valuable to your readers.

Bottom line: You can comply with anti-spam regulations, and look good doing it, by sending your outreach and marketing emails through an ESP system.

"Dear Digit" is penned by Bethann Garramon Merkle, a Choteau native with a passion for the arts and our dynamic state. She is an artist and teaching artist with a passion for effective communication. She coaches nonprofit organizations, small businesses and individuals on how to integrate the arts into science and sustainability initiatives. Pose your questions online at [www.commnatural.com/deardigit](http://www.commnatural.com/deardigit).